

## **2007 – Our Year of Water**

By City Councilor Chris Calvert

Governor Bill Richardson has declared 2007 the “Year of Water,” providing much-sought after funding for important water projects in Santa Fe and other cities around the state.

I would like to ask the community to consider making this their own year of water. Although Santa Fe has been blessed with an abundance of snow this winter, New Mexico continues to be in the midst of a drought cycle.

As the chairman of the city’s Water Conservation Committee, I think we have a responsibility as a city to lead by example in water conservation. Water is a precious and scarce commodity in Santa Fe, and water conservation is important to New Mexico's water future.

We need to be consciously aware of the value of this resource and use it as wisely as possible. Conserving water means we can extend the water supply for future generations, reduce the risk of water shortages, and improve the health of rivers and groundwater.

Conservation is also our cheapest source of new water. Infrastructure for water projects is expensive, and buying water rights is becoming increasingly costly. The less we spend on getting water, the more our residents will save on their water bills in the long term.

If each of us saved a few additional gallons today, we could help guarantee a healthy water supply for tomorrow and improve the quality of life for our residents. Water saved through conservation can be used to keep our existing parks green, for new parks or for the community’s desire for a living river.

Many Santa Feans have already done a good job of making water conservation part of their daily lives. Our community should be proud of its conservation efforts to date. Water usage in Santa Fe dropped from more than 120 gallons per-person per-day a few years ago to about 108 gallons per-person per-day in 2005. But there is always more that we can do. Most conservation initiatives have focused on indoor residential uses. We should now turn more attention to outdoor water usage. We must also find ways to reach out to Santa Fe’s businesses and institutions to conserve water, especially when new facilities are built.

Three major city construction projects – the Railyard, civic center and Southside Library – will serve as models for water conservation. Plans for the Railyard incorporate a mix of water conservation and water harvesting strategies. These strategies include sustainable parklands and water harvesting infrastructure to capture, store and irrigate with rain water captured from the rooftops of adjacent buildings. The civic center, which the City Council voted to build according to national sustainable standards, will include a number of water saving features; and the design of the Southside Library, set to open this spring,

includes water harvesting cisterns that recycle water for use on the library's low-maintenance natural landscaping.

The City of Santa Fe has worked very hard to make conservation part of our everyday lives. After more than three years of work, the Santa Fe City Council adopted new comprehensive water conservation requirements, which took effect January 1 of this year. These requirements make permanent some formerly seasonal restrictions and tie the price of water to usage so higher rates are imposed on heavy users. Residents who use less than 7,000 gallons a month between September and April and less than 10,000 gallons a month between May and August will be charged \$4.09 per 1,000 gallons. Residents who use more than that will be charged \$14.64 per 1,000 gallons.

Making even the smallest changes to daily habits can make a big difference. For example, you could save 200 to 500 gallons of water per month by not running the faucet unnecessarily. This could include turning the faucet off while brushing your teeth or keeping a cold bottle of water in the refrigerator instead of running tap water until it cools for drinking.

The installation of high efficiency appliances can also save water, not to mention money on your water bill. A water efficient washing machine uses almost half as much water as older, less efficient models. Residents who replace old washing machines with energy efficient models can also take advantage of the city's rebate program. Many water conservation resources are available through the City's Water Division.

Together, we can make a difference in Santa Fe's water future.